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Chairman: Mr. GUERRERO (Philippines)
(Vice-Chairman)

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In the absence of Mr. Piriz-Ballon (Uruguay), Mr. Guerrero (Philippines), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 11.35 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 81: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (continued) A/47/82-S/23512, A/47/88-S/23563, A/47/225, A/47/312-S/24238, A/47/391, A/47/437, A/47/441, A/47/449-S/24566, A/47/499, A/47/530, A/47/564; E/1992/47)

General debate (continued)

1. Mr. LAWSON (Togo) said that his delegation acknowledged the considerable progress made in several areas - life expectancy, literacy and mortality rates, access to health services and clean water - but was outraged by the continued spread of the poverty currently affecting more than 1.1 billion people, especially in Asia and Africa. According to the latest report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on the situation of children in the world, the number of families which could not meet their basic needs had doubled in 10 years and drought was again threatening 27 million people in 14 countries; and the number of children suffering from malnutrition had increased since 1980. Sub-Saharan Africa had been hit particularly hard: the report of the eighteenth session of the World Food Council (WFC) indicated that 20 countries were experiencing serious food crises and that the threat to them of famine and epidemics was probably more serious than during the recent disaster years.

2. Notwithstanding the goals of the latest International Development Strategy, programmes and policies for the eradication of poverty still suffered from a hostile economic environment. The gap between rich and poor countries was growing ever wider, whether it was a question of incomes, growth levels, access to markets, or human capital.

3. With regard to official development assistance (ODA), the targets which the international community had set itself were far from being attained; in fact ODA represented only 0.35 per cent of the gross national product (GNP) of the industrialized countries (instead of 0.7 per cent), i.e. $54 billion a year, whereas that amount would have to be virtually quadrupled in order to increase the average growth rate of the developing countries by 2 per cent; the distribution of ODA also left much to be desired, for only a quarter was allocated to the countries in which three quarters of the world's poor lived, and it was used mainly to meet basic needs: only 6.5 per cent of bilateral assistance was allocated to programmes of elementary education, primary health care, drinking water supply, family planning and nutrition.

4. The economic growth of the developing countries, which was an essential condition for the eradication of poverty, was impeded by various external factors such as the sharp decline in commodity prices and the protectionism in the industrialized countries. It must be stressed in that regard that the

(Mr. Lawson, Togo)

stalemate in the Uruguay negotiations was having adverse effects on the food security and the economies of the developing countries; the social costs of structural adjustment programmes and the crushing burden of foreign debt, which had risen from $100 billion in 1970 to $1,350 billion in 1990 were also major obstacles to the poverty-eradication campaign.

5. The efforts made at the national and international levels had so far proved vain, as the General Assembly had noted in resolution 46/141, but the new drive for solidarity resulting from the Rio Conference on Environment and Development and the Cartagena Commitment were generating hopes of an intensification of the fight against poverty. To that end, development assistance must be redirected, mainly towards the poorest countries and satisfaction of basic needs, making it more predictable, increasing the proportion of multilateral aid, and establishing a timetable for achievement of the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP. Action plans must also be drawn up at the forthcoming International Conference on Nutrition with a view to achieving the nutritional targets set by the World Summit for Children and providing the developing countries with assistance to bring about a new green revolution which would lead to food security and self-sufficiency. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must be more closely involved in the planning and implementation of poverty-eradication programmes. Inspiration must be drawn from the example of UNICEF, whose anti-AIDS programmes enjoyed the support of various NGOs. Remission of some two thirds of the debt must also be envisaged, as had been proposed in September 1991 by the Conference of Commonwealth Finance Ministers. The UNICEF initiative for debt relief for the benefit of children ought to be encouraged and extended to programmes of family planning, primary health care, drinking water supply and literacy. On the conclusion of the Uruguay negotiations measures should be taken to liberalize international trade and open up markets to the goods produced by the developing countries.

6. His delegation thought that a machinery for dealing with all aspects of the issue of poverty should be established within the United Nations system and it hoped that a high-level inter-agency meeting would be convened in order to establish a common methodology for a harmonzied system of social indicators. It also hoped that the forthcoming international meetings on economic and social matters would be used to advantage for the establishment of action plans for the eradication of poverty.

7. It welcomed the preparation of an international convention on desertification pursuant to the Agenda 21 programme and the creation by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation of an independent committee with a brief to fight poverty; that initiative might usefully serve as an example to other regions.

8. Archbishop MARTINO (Permanent Observer for the Holy See) said that it was good that the eradication of poverty and the satisfaction of peoples' basic needs were now the focus of development activities. This new humanitarian attitude, far from reducing the importance of scientific and technological

(Archbishop Martino, Permanent Observer, Holy See)

progress, was a guarantee of its validity. The disparity between rich and poor and the prevalence of poverty in a world so rich in scientific and material resources was an affront to human dignity and a challenge to the conscience of mankind. The international community could not tolerate a situation in which millions of human beings lived in poverty or even died through lack of the essential necessities to which every human being had a right. It must therefore be mobilized to provide immediate relief for the suffering of the poorest people and commit itself to encouraging the social, economic and political reforms which were essential to the genuine development of all nations; as Pope Paul VI had said, development was the new name for peace.

9. The Church had always regarded service to the poor and needy as one of its essential tasks. It had inspired and sustained innumerable institutions and organizations which were the precursors of today's social assistance programmes. In the spirit of its Founder, who had chosen to identify himself with the needy, the thirsty, the hungry, the homeless and the oppressed, the Church continued to preach love for the poor, for it was convinced that assistance could be effective only if it was furnished in a spirit of respect for individual dignity and of the solidarity and responsibility by means of which all could have access to the world's resources, while still caring for the environment, and live in peace and security.

10. The spiritual impoverishment of society, the denial of human rights, and practices which injured human dignity or which denied access to the spiritual and the transcendent were all forms of deprivation just as serious as material poverty. The struggle against poverty would be complete only when all persons were able to fulfil their human, cultural, spiritual and religious aspirations. The Second Committee correctly placed the issue of poverty in the wider context of international cooperation, since, while much of the task of eliminating poverty must take place at the local level, only solidarity, especially solidarity between developing and industrialized countries, would overcome poverty, as stressed by Pope John Paul II on the occasion of the 1990 World Peace Day. Such solidarity was a moral imperative to which the realities of international economic relations - protectionism, technological monopolies, excessive debt burden - continued to run counter. At the same time the leaders of the developing countries had a responsibility to eliminate factors that weakened the confidence of potential investors and to allow their own citizens to participate in the development of a just economic order.

11. The struggle against poverty and the affirmation of human dignity were at the heart of almost every item before the Committee. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development had recently reaffirmed the inseparable link between the fundamental right to development and the rights and duties that governed the use of resources and the protection of the environment. The documents adopted at the Rio Conference - the two Conventions, the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and the consensus on the conservation of forests - must be consolidated and developed. The forthcoming

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conferences on human rights, on population and development and on women would touch on vital aspects of the dignity of the human person and would contribute to a lessening of the inhuman suffering caused by deprivation and poverty. He welcomed the proposal to organize a world summit for social development in 1995, as proposed at the Security Council Summit in January 1992. That initiative would provide an opportunity to go beyond the purely economic impact of poverty and to base development on human resources. As the Holy See had affirmed at UNCED, in the consideration of every issue, however technical, due account must be taken of the ethical dimension and respect for human dignity.

12. Suffering was not an abstract concept, just another variable in a complex process. The poor must not be seen as the causes rather than the victims of their misfortunes. The goods of the Earth had been destined by God for the benefit of all, and development could be achieved only by guaranteeing a share for all and by not excluding any.

13. The eradication of poverty meant the extirpation of the roots of poverty. That implied reform of all the institutionalized forms of injustice, described by Pope John Paul II as "structures of sin". The international community must not only listen to the cry of the poor and lend its voice to it, but respond to their pleading with generous solidarity.

14. Mr. AROSEMENA (Panama), speaking on behalf of the countries of Central America, said that there had been an alarming increase in poverty during the 1980s, particularly in the developing countries, and that its eradication must be the principal objective of development strategies in the years ahead.

15. It was for those countries above all to make concerted and sustained efforts on the domestic front to attain economic growth accompanied by social justice. The Governments of the Central American countries had received a mandate to strengthen democratic structures, promote respect for human rights and improve the well-being of their peoples. In the economic sphere, they had opened up their markets to the influence of supply and demand and stabilized their budgetary and monetary policies while seeking to liberalize trade. But such reforms were having a major impact on their peoples, particularly the poorer sectors. For that reason, in response to increasing social unrest and political concerns, the Central American countries were, during the 1990s, seeking to implement economic reforms accompanied by programmes to promote social justice, so that growth would be equitably distributed among different categories.

16. More than 60 per cent of the population of the region lived in poverty. Short-term and medium-term social programmes were thus essential in ending illiteracy, malnutrition and rapid population growth and in reducing high infant mortality rates.

17. The deterioration in the social situation was reflected in high

(Mr. Arosemena, Panama)

unemployment rates, particularly among the young, the resurgence of delinquency in major cities, the deterioration in health conditions and increase in the number of displaced persons, as well as being reflected in accelerated and uncontrolled urbanization and in environmental degradation. That was why Governments were seeking to incorporate the people in the process of economic and social development through the creation of productive jobs, an increase in funding for the social sector and community organization.

18. The countries of Central America reiterated their support for the peace process, economic adjustment and poverty mitigation. The economic and political reforms that they were implementing required a favourable international climate: settlement of the debt crisis, an end to protectionist measures that restricted international trade, and an increase in foreign investment and financial resources on concessional terms. The resources set free by such measures would make it possible to combat poverty.

19. It was regrettable that the developed world did not support the efforts of the developing countries more energetically. Witness the stagnation in the Uruguay Round and the strengthening of protectionist measures against commodities, as well as the inadequacy of financial assistance, the developed countries not having kept their commitment to devote 0.7 per cent of GNP to official development assistance.

20. Mr. AHMIA (Algeria) said that despite scientific and technological progress more than a billion people continued to live in absolute poverty, more than 24 million children died every year, more than 1 1/2 billion people had no access to medicines, 900 million adults were illiterate, more than a billion people lived in substandard housing and a fifth of the population of the South suffered from hunger. In such circumstances, the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade had rightly made an urgent and priority objective of poverty eradication, which also occupied a central place in the United Nations new agenda for the development of Africa in the 1990s.

21. Increasingly, the developing countries were adopting economic reforms, sometimes at the cost of their internal stability, with a view to reorienting economic policy and achieving a more efficient utilization of resources. However, despite enormous efforts and sacrifices made at high social cost, the situation was still disturbing, not to say alarming, in many areas of the world. That was particularly so in Africa, an especially hard-hit continent, which included three quarters of the poorest countries and in which the socio-economic situation continued to decline. Africa's economy was collapsing, with all the resultant social consequences: malnutrition, famine, disease and epidemics, notably acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), which were wiping out ever greater numbers of people. Natural disasters exacerbated those appalling conditions.

22. Nothing realistic or effective had been done by the international community to stop those dreadful forces. The commitments so readily

(Mr. Ahmia, Algeria)

undertaken had not even begun to be implemented, a fact which had contributed to the failure of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development. It was to be hoped that the international community, aware of the inexorable deterioration of the situation in Africa, would actively demonstrate solidarity on behalf of a continent in distress, in particular by implementing the United Nations new agenda for the development of Africa in the 1990s, adopted at the forty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

23. As the South Commission had observed, the poor, who in many developing countries consituted the majority of the population, would not continue meekly to accept the idea that they must resign themselves to their suffering and deprivation indefinitely. When the lifestyle of one part of the population of a poor country was incompatible with that country's level of development and resources, the disparity could generate serious political and economic tension, thereby destroying the consensus necessary for the application of coherent and effective development policies.

24. The implementation of structural adjustment programmes had not made it possible to reduce the gap which still separated the various strata of society. The situation of the poorest continued to deteriorate in several countries. Those programmes had not produced the desired results, and meeting needs for food, education, health, drinking water, hygiene and sanitation remained one of the most legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the South. It was essential that such programmes should take the human dimension of development into account in the social sector, particularly the needs of the most vulnerable groups in society. A social safety net must be put in place. The United Nations should concentrate its efforts on eradicating poverty, while the developed countries should take the necessary steps to rectify their macroeconomic policies and lift the trade barriers which were hindering developing country exports. The developed countries must help to improve prospects for development by means of more and better financial assistance. To be fully effective, any action aimed at eradicating poverty had to be undertaken within the context of a global and coherent strategy involving the United Nations system in its entirety. Multilateral cooperation was needed more than ever. However, it was necessary to move beyond the initial planning and study stage in order to transform that cooperation into concrete action plans and genuinely operational assistance plans.

25. Mrs. SANTANA (Venezuela) said that the new international situation and the new concept of development based on an international partnership highlighted the need to strike a balance between social equality and ecologically sound economic growth. In that context, it was essential that the international community should give priority to social problems, notably the fight against poverty, because deteriorating living conditions constituted a threat to international peace and security.

26. For that reason, the problem of poverty must be tackled in an integrated fashion, within a framework of coordinated strategies. Agenda 21 had clearly

(Mrs. Santana, Venezuela)

stressed the principle of international partnership, stating that if the problem was to be resolved, country-specific poverty-eradication programmes must be set up and national activities must be supported by international efforts even as a favourable international environment was created.

27. Venezuela had always considered that the implementation of structural adjustment measures and the sound management of social development programmes, requiring a more equitable distribution of national wealth, were a prerequisite to satisfying the population's basic needs. Within that context, Venezuela reaffirmed its support for the concept of sustainable development, taking the view that there was a direct relationship between poverty and environmental deterioration.

28. In practice, Venezuela had always devoted significant amounts of money to its social development programmes, which during the 1970s had accounted for approximately 40 per cent of public expenditure and from 10 per cent to 14 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). Venezuela had continued its efforts during the 1980s, despite the crisis-induced pressure on social and general expenditure in the region, and would continue to endeavour to make efficient use of the resources at its disposal to eliminate poverty and meet the needs of the most disadvantaged groups in the areas of health, food and education.

29. Yet the solution of the problem of poverty was not dependent solely on sound management and equitable distribution of national resources, which in most cases were in themselves insufficient. Increased cooperation on the part of the developed countries was essential if there was to be a fundamental change in the existing economic system, characterized as it was by falling raw-material prices, constantly rising interest rates, the strengthening of protectionist barriers and the heavy external debt burden.

30. On the latter point, for example, Venezuela's debt repayments for 1993 would account for approximately 24 per cent of its entire resources, an alarming figure which jeopardized the implementation of programmes to reduce the social impact of structural reforms. It was necessary, therefore, to approach the problem of external debt from a different perspective, taking into account the need for a real resumption of economic growth and social development in the poorest countries. To that end, financial flows to the developing countries must be increased, as must multilateral credits, direct foreign investment and resources allocated on concessional terms.

31. An international trading system that was more open, freer, balanced and disciplined must also be established; to that end, it was essential that the Uruguay Round should be concluded rapidly.

32. In conclusion, her delegation was pleased that the question of poverty had been included in the agenda of the recent substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, reflecting as it did the concern of Member States to enhance the coordination of the efforts by various United Nations bodies to eradicate poverty.

33. Mr. KIM (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) pointed out that poverty in the developing countries was the main factor responsible for environmental degradation and one of the greatest obstacles to sustainable development. The principal reason for that phenomenon was the unfavourable international economic environment, which had continued to weaken the economic situation of the developing countries during the 1980s. There could be no lasting peace in the world as long as the majority of the world's population lived in abject poverty and underdevelopment. Persistent global recession, the widening gap between developed and developing countries, growing protectionism, massive debt, negative transfer of resources and the gradual erosion of the trading system continued to cloud the prospect of eradicating poverty.

34. It was necessary to address the underlying problems producing that phenomenon. Although primary responsibility remained with the developing countries, the developed countries also had a responsibility which they should not shirk, namely, to show solidarity in the fight against poverty by creating a favourable international economic environment. Sufficient resources should be made available for that common undertaking. Commitments made by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development should be fulfilled. It was also necessary to reach official development assistance targets and ensure the transfer of resources through direct foreign investments and debt relief. His delegation supported the proposal to convene an international conference on development financing to address the global poverty problem.

35. International actions aimed at eliminating poverty should take into account the specific conditions of each country. Priority should be given to poverty reduction, technology transfer and institutional capacity-building of the developing countries. To improve the effectiveness of assistance, there was a need for enhanced coordination in the design and implementation of programmes between the organizations of the United Nations system and the Governments concerned. Institutional reforms at the United Nations should be complemented by practical steps to alleviate poverty. It was particularly important that human settlements be improved and that Governments provide guarantees to create the necessary conditions to that end. Improvement of the role of women in economic activity and in the decision-making process for development was also essential.

36. Mrs. ULLOA (Ecuador) underlined the paradox whereby international cooperation and assistance had not succeeded in changing the world situation and, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, poverty was spreading in spite of technological and scientific advancements. Thus, the conclusion to be drawn was that the cooperation and assistance provided had been insufficient. In a world where the disparity between rich and poor was growing, the fight against impoverishment was a duty of the international community.

37. The term "poverty" implied a number of deficiencies: social, economic, political and cultural; those resulted, however, from one basic deficiency: the lack of access, because of poor nutrition, to health and education. In the developing countries, poor people did not have access to a decent education or to a proper diet; that had in turn led to inequality in

(Mrs. Ulloa, Ecuador)

development and to poverty. The Governments of those countries needed to feed and educate their populations as a priority goal.

38. The situation was worsening for the developing countries owing to the unfavourable international economic environment. In spite of their efforts to attain economic stability, it was difficult for those countries to implement development plans, given inequitable terms of trade, the stagnation of resource transfers and the increasing foreign debt.

39. The international community had a duty to combat poverty, primarily from a moral standpoint, for the human conscience could not tolerate the existence of 1.5 billion poor people; from a demographic standpoint, since population growth remained one of the main causes of persistent poverty; from an ecological standpoint, as poverty was known to be a source of environmental destruction; and, finally, from a political standpoint, as poverty was a threat to national and international stability.

40. It was vital for a global political will, taking advantage of peace dividends and current opportunities for economic cooperation, to endeavour to build a better world for future generations, in which the interdependence of nations and solidarity of peoples would not be vain words.

41. Mr. SY (Executive Secretary of the Organization of African Unity) said that poverty was one of the greatest enemies of mankind and that, in the past 30 years, major efforts had been undertaken by the world community, Governments and non-governmental organizations to eradicate poverty, but that those efforts had generally been subsumed under aspects of North-South economic cooperation: foreign aid, technical assistance and relief programmes. The last decade, however, had been one of unprecedented increased poverty in the developing countries, especially in Africa. That suggested that greater attention should be directed to the root causes of poverty. In Africa, poverty had enormously compounded the problems of underdevelopment. The standard of living had fallen precipitously. The average earnings of individuals in the urban areas had been reduced to subsistence level. The middle class in Africa had become extinct in the wake of rigorous application of structural adjustment programmes. The lower classes had sunk deeper into deprivation. Despite migration to urban areas, a substantial part of the population continued to live in the rural areas. Agriculture remained the principal economic activity, but farmers had been impoverished as a result of the decline in prices of their export commodities. The demand for those commodities had been generally sluggish, while at the same time the output of several cash crops had been adversely affected by drought, especially in the Sahelian region. The inevitable result had been a massive reduction in agricultural workers' incomes. On the whole, income had fallen by over 40 per cent in Africa since the beginning of the 1980s. In addition, in Somalia and the Sudan, for example, internal conflicts had led to large refugee problems and precipitated a horrifying famine of vast proportions.

(Mr. Sy)

42. Given the general impoverishment of Africa and certain countries in Asia and Latin America, there was a need to find permanent solutions to the fundamental causes of that phenomenon, especially as the global economic system was inescapably interdependent. Unabated poverty in the developing countries would, in the long run, have far-reaching adverse consequences for the developed countries, leading not only to fewer markets for their industrial products in developing countries but also to a waste of financial resources when those were used to cope with conflicts which poverty intrinsically engendered.

43. As poverty tightened its grip on Africa, the international community must facilitate the conclusion of agreements on realistic world commodity prices. Higher prices on world markets would raise the income of farmers and enhance the capacity of many African countries to provide much-needed infrastructure such as schools and hospitals. Increased national earnings from higher prices, increased output and demand would enable African countries to import more capital goods for development purposes.

44. In order to cope with the fundamental problem of production, international cooperation must be strengthened in order to increase capital inflow. The structural adjustment programmes to which many African countries were committed required substantial amounts of capital. Also, the debt burden would need to be reduced through more debt write-offs and the inflow of new capital; the latter was vital in order to revive the moribund industrial and agricultural sectors. Under the structural adjustment programmes, African countries were highly receptive to foreign private investments. The conditions offered to foreign investors were very attractive. The new investment codes in many countries were very generous and the establishment of democratic political systems would bring stability to the political systems.

45. In 1991, Africa had established the African Economic Community (AEC); its aims included the promotion of rapid industrial and agricultural development and the expansion of trade and scientific cooperation in partial fulfilment of the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos. UNDP had provided valuable assistance in that endeavour. However, the full operationalization of the Community would hinge in large measure on the support of the international community as well as of the African countries themselves. At the international level, financial support would be required for the Community's industrial and agricultural projects. The Community would also need financial assistance in order to build the infrastructure needed to link African States, otherwise integration would remain an empty dream. OAU therefore urged the international community to provide adequate financial support for the African Economic Community. The Community represented the basic instrument for self-sustained economic growth and development which were the surest means of eradicating poverty in Africa.

46. High priority must be accorded to the issues of desertification, drought and famine. Desertification was a result of human activities; given adequate technical resources it could therefore be arrested. Drought, on the other

(Mr. Sy)

hand, was a natural phenomenon; if extreme, it led to famine. Individual African countries seldom had the wherewithal to deal effectively with those problems. OAU therefore would welcome the speedy negotiation of a convention on desertification and drought. It also hoped that substantial financial support would be accorded to United Nations agencies in order to implement the provisions of the future convention.

47. The rising poverty in the developing countries, especially in Africa, posed a major challenge to the new world order. The new world order should be free of conflict, encourage enduring political interaction, promote world trade and capital movements and fuel world economic growth. However, those objectives might prove difficult to achieve if a substantial portion of the world's population continued to suffer from chronic penury. All countries were inextricably linked to the world economic system; the latter exerted a strong influence on the pace of their economic growth and development but remained beyond their control. In other words, nothing short of equitable global trade and an adequate flow of financial resources and technical assistance to the developing countries, particularly those in Africa, would bring about a genuine eradication of poverty.

48. Mr. WEIBGEN (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) said that, since time was short, he would merely give a summary of his statement, which began with a review of the incidence, nature and scope of rural poverty and mentioned a number of complementary policies that Governments must take to alleviate poverty. FAO devoted special attention to the situation of countries that were engaged in processes of structural adjustment and to those which were in transition to a market economy; those countries needed external support. Since the 1979 World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, FAO had intensified its efforts to assist member Governments meet the objectives of poverty alleviation. Specifically, it had organized inter-agency policy missions to 21 countries in order to help in the formulation of national policies and programmes, and about 20 regional inter-agency consultations on agrarian reform and rural development; it had also facilitated intergovernmental consultations on poverty-related subjects at the regional level and carried out 19 country case-studies on the causes and incidence of rural poverty and means for its alleviation. Recent FAO conferences had adopted two main plans of action, the Plan of Action on Women in Agricultural Development and the Plan of Action on People's Participation in Rural Development.

49. FAO attached great importance to cooperation among Governments, donors, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations in the efforts to alleviate world poverty; it organized meetings of the Task Force on rural development of the Administrative Committee on Coordination to facilitate the cooperation of United Nations agencies in the area of rural poverty alleviation. Such initiatives would contribute to the close inter-agency cooperation and coordination that Member States, in particular the Group of 77 and the European Community, earnestly desired.

50. Mr. MONGBE (Benin) said that poverty remained a major concern and one of the most serious threats to the future of mankind. It was a universal problem. The number of people living in poverty was estimated at more than 1 billion world wide, of whom 600 million were considered to be extremely poor.

51. Although the Secretary-General noted in his report (E/1992/47) that the structural adjustment programmes being carried out in a number of developing countries were accelerating growth, he nevertheless recognized that their implementation was having an extremely adverse impact on the vulnerable groups. Many other international organizations, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UNICEF, FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO) had published studies citing the high social cost of such programmes; such intellectual honesty would seem to indicate a genuine determination to alleviate the adverse consequences of such adjustments.

52. Some consequences were worth singling out in order to stress the seriousness of the situation, especially in light of the fact that human beings were supposed to be at the centre of all development policies. In order to implement their structural adjustment programmes, developing countries were having to make sharp cuts in resources for the social sector. Given the importance of the social sector for the most disadvantaged, it followed that unless structural adjustment schemes were accompanied by vigorous measures to improve the social situation, they might upset the political stability of the countries concerned.

53. A new type of poverty was evident in many African countries. Indeed, a new category of unemployed was emerging comprising workers who had been laid off from State or para-Statal enterprises which had been liquidated or privatized; they were becoming a destitute underclass. Similarly, many young graduates often from very low-income families could not find jobs because of the vast number of civil servants and the smallness of the labour market in the private sector.

54. In his report, the Secretary-General had rightly given special importance to the problem of eradicating poverty and had examined in detail the question of coordinating the activities of United Nations bodies in that field. The Economic and Social Council, at its substantive 1992 session, had recommended the preparation of an overall system-wide framework for the coordination of those activities. In his opinion, the United Nations system should work out national and international global and integrated approaches and strategies for the eradication of poverty capable of stimulating independent initiatives for rural and urban development; establish links between the goals of eradicating poverty and the optimization of human resources; promote the concept of coherence in the coordination of national plans and policies, multilateral and bilateral aid programmes and the activities of regional bodies and non-governmental organizations seeking to eradicate poverty, and prepare sectoral and intersectoral strategies for combating poverty.

(Mr. Mongbe, Benin)

55. His delegation welcomed the important place given the problem of eradicating poverty in the proceedings of the Rio de Janeiro Conference on Environment and Development and reaffirmed its total support of Section I, chapter 3, of the Agenda 21 programme.

56. All countries should establish specific anti-poverty programmes which should be supported by the international community. In that connection, it was to be hoped that the end of the cold war would make it possible to free substantial resources which could be allocated to that purpose. The United Nations should work out a strategy aimed specifically at combating poverty in order to ensure lasting development.

57. The long-term goal advocated by Agenda 21 for the sustainable management of resources and the eradication of poverty was intended to enable populations to enjoy sustainable livelihoods. Policies based on human development should therefore be applied and integrated programmes worked out for all the disadvantaged regions aiming at the reduction of poverty by the creation of jobs and income.

58. Governments should be encouraged to increase their investments in their human capital through programmes intended for the poor rural and urban zones and all vulnerable groups of society. The achievement of lasting development and, consequently, the eradication of poverty, required broad public participation not only in development activities but also in the decision-making process. Women had an important part to play in that field and should be given the full consideration they were entitled to.

59. His delegation reaffirmed its support of the World Summit Plan of Action for Children and of UNICEF's remarkable three-pronged anti-poverty strategy usually called the three-A Approach (appraisal, analysis and action). It was glad that, in its fifth programme cycle, UNDP had made poverty one of its six priorities. UNDP's approach, which was based on the strengthening of national development capacities, was highly responsible as it was aimed at achieving human development, i.e., the creation of income and jobs, greater access to health care, and education and housing for the most disadvantaged groups.

60. His delegation applauded FAO's programme of permanently monitoring the availability of food supplies in the developing countries and its adoption of programmes intended to diminish poverty by stimulating production and growth in the agricultural sector. It also welcomed the action taken by WHO to promote access by the poor to primary health care within the framework of its "Health for all by the year 2000" campaign.

61. Regional conflicts and hotbeds of tension within countries, as well as the extreme poverty resulting from drought and desertification, were forcing numerous populations into internal migration or migration to other countries, aggravating still further the precariousness of their conditions of life. UNHCR was carrying out a difficult task admirably, and was seeking, in spite of its limited means, to meet the fundamental needs of those refugees or

(Mr. Mongbe, Benin)

displaced persons. It was to be hoped that the international community would mobilize to increase the funds made available to it.

62. It was essential to work out a rational policy of international cooperation for the eradication of poverty. Various important documents had been adopted for that purpose within the framework of international meetings, including the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, the Declaration issued at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the various documents adopted at the Rio Conference on Environment and Development, which should be implemented quickly.

63. It was encouraging to note that the heads of all the United Nations bodies now recognized the overriding need for a large-scale research effort to eliminate poverty; the usefulness of the strategies intended to increase the capacity of poor populations to attain a decent level of life; the importance of the problem of hunger; the need to work out plans of action to integrate women into development, and the urgent need to work out measures to protect the most vulnerable groups. It was to be hoped that the many statements made to that effect would not remain dead letters, as it was essential to break the vicious circle of poverty so that every human being could lead an acceptable life. That was the challenge the international community must take up.

64. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN said that the Committee had completed its consideration of agenda item 81.

Organization of work (A/C.2/47/L.1 and A/C.2/47/L.1 and Add.1)

65. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN said that the Afghan delegation had asked the President of the General Assembly to consider transferring consideration of the agenda item entitled "Emergency international assistance for the reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan" to the plenary. He therefore proposed to postpone consideration of the question until the Assembly had taken a decision on the matter.

The meeting rose at 1.40 p.m.